

Application of Cool-Season Forages on Central Florida Livestock Operations

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Background and Objectives: Management of livestock can often be an area that leaves money on the table, particularly with winter feeding. Supplementation during the 120-day cool-season in Florida poses an economic threat to many cattle producers. Cool-season forages cost an average of \$100-300 per acre to establish and can supply adequate nutrition to many classes of livestock through the winter. The primary objective of this program was to showcase the results of cool-season annual forages adapted to Central Florida, the planting and establishment methods, fertilization regime, and grazing management for maximum utilization of the forages.

Methods: This program was a collaboration with the University of Florida Agronomy Department, UF/IFAS Extension in Marion County, and the University of Florida Cervidae Health Research Initiative. A Marion County cattle and deer producer offered his ranch for planting the cool-season forage demonstration plots and allowed us to host a field day with interested clientele to promote the use of cool-season annual forages on livestock operations. The forages were planted into a well prepared seedbed 90 days prior to the field day and were fertilized twice at the rate across all forages. A total of 24 forage plots of 50' X 100' were planted via a cone planter and no-till drill.



60-days post planting of the forage plots. 24 plots ranging from small grains, rye grasses, brassicas, and clovers were planted and managed the same.



A local cattle ranch allowed us to use his land for planting the demonstration plots and he hosted the lecture portion of the field day in his authentic bunk house.



Attendees were able to see the success and failures of the forages adapted to the region and collaborate with other producers on their experiences.

Results: 54 people attended the field day representing over 3,500 acres and 1,000 head of beef cattle in Central Florida. Topics included wildlife health and management (an ancillary benefit to these forages), beef cattle nutrition, and management of cool-season annual forages with regards to impacting the bottom line of livestock operations. After the classroom presentations and a sponsored lunch, a tour of the demonstration plots allowed participants to ask more questions and see first-hand the success and failure of various forages. Post program surveys show:

- 80% expect to see reduced cost of production or a higher return on investment by implementing annual forages.
- 44% plan to utilize cool-season forages in 2020.
- 80% improved understanding of forage management.